



**Philipp Ther**

## The burden of history and the trap of memory

*Erzwungene Wege* ["Forced journeys"] is the title of the newly opened exhibition at the German Historical Museum in Berlin on the history of forced migration in Europe. It has been organized by the German League of Expellees, which represents Germans forced to migrate after WWII, and is a step towards the League's goal to set up a permanent exhibition in the German capital. The exhibition has been the source of ongoing diplomatic conflict between Germany and its eastern neighbours — above all Poland — since the League called on Poland to pay compensation to former German owners of Polish property and even opposed Poland's accession to the EU. Philipp Ther outlines the background of the historical conflict between Germany and Poland, the reasons behind the paradigm shift from culprit to victim in the German view of its history, and the enduring and very different memory in Poland of the German occupation.

Ever since the decision was taken to enlarge the EU, German–Polish relations have failed to run smoothly. A central point of conflict since 2003 has been and is an allegedly abstract matter: the history of both countries. The most controversial issue of all is how to deal with the period of occupation between 1939 and 1945, and with the ensuing flight and expulsion of the Germans from the former German territories in the east. Though the former German president Johannes Rau, his successor Horst Köhler, and the last Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski have repeatedly gone to lengths to encourage conciliatory gestures and a German–Polish dialogue, the differences between Germany and Poland over the memory of the decade from 1939 to 1948 cannot be overcome on the diplomatic level only.

Were it merely a matter of political understanding, it is likely that an agreement could be reached relatively promptly. The occupation of Poland counts among the cruellest manifestations of National Socialism. Three million Polish Jews and just as many non–Jewish Poles were murdered, millions were enslaved as forced labourers, and towards the end of the war, the capital Warsaw was reduced to ashes. On the German side, there were around eight million refugees and expellees from Poland, who were either fleeing the Red Army or forced to migrate after the end of the war. It will never be possible to establish beyond doubt how deaths were caused; however, it was above all children and the elderly who died while fleeing, as a result either of malnutrition, cold, or being caught in the crossfire.

### **Victim discourse**

During the Cold War, the memory both of the Nazi occupation in Poland and the displacement in West Germany was fairly distanced, since there was a lack of communication between the two countries. Hence, the Germans' and the Poles' definition of themselves as victims was left undisturbed. In the FRG,

this view was above all prevalent during the 1950s; after 1968, the focus increasingly fell on Germany's crimes during the Holocaust. However, it was more difficult to openly recognize guilt towards Poland than towards the Jews. Even today, as a result of the domination of the commemoration of the Holocaust in the remembrance of German crimes, the Polish occupation plays a lesser role in the public consciousness. In contrast, the everyday terror wrought upon Poland between 1939 and 1945 counts as just a detail in the overall picture of National Socialist crimes in central and eastern Europe. Generally speaking, anti-Semitism in German history is essentially better addressed than anti-Polish prejudice, which continued to strongly mark the early period of the FRG.<sup>1</sup>

In Poland, the debate about the nation's own guilty history got underway only after 1989 in connection with the persecution of the Jews. Traditionally, Poland defined itself as a victim, a view that, given the division of the country between 1795 and 1918, the occupation during WWII, and the ensuing Soviet hegemony, was adequately supported. A major shock was caused in 2001 by the discovery of events in Jedwabne, a small Polish town whose population had taken part in the murder of the local Jews during WWII. At first, conservative and religious circles denied or downplayed the crime; however, the former Polish president Aleksander Kwasniewski attended the central commemoration ceremony in Jedwabne, and, after initial hesitation, the former Primate of Poland, Cardinal Józef Glemp, led a ceremony for the victims.<sup>2</sup> After 1989, Polish historians also carried out a broad review of the past with regard to Germany. Now there are numerous publications documenting the expulsions, including the worst of the accompanying phenomena such as the labour camps.<sup>3</sup> These publications, which in part reached a wider reading public, clearly express the kind of suffering expulsion and forced re-settlement can mean.

While after 1989 a cautious distancing took place in Poland from the nation's former image of itself as victim, it has been possible to observe the opposite in the reunited Germany in recent years. The victim discourse has been booming, above all since the publication of Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* [*Crabwalk*]. The subject of expulsion, which as a result of Willy Brandt's policy towards eastern Europe was peripheral, has recently shifted to the centre of media attention. If one looks at the pictures of expellees, for example the issue of *Spiegel spezial* on the flight and expulsion of the Germans,<sup>4</sup> the message is clear: hunched and miserable expellees clearly dominate the pictures, and are thus shown only as victims.<sup>5</sup> The numerous articles, films, and books that have appeared of late ask much less about the history of the expellees before 1945. The NSDAP had strongholds in the eastern territories of Germany — whence the military vice was applied to Poland in 1939. Germans from the Sudetenland voted overwhelmingly for a National Socialist party in 1938, and thus contributed to the "smashing" of Czechoslovakia, as Hitler called it. Though it would be morally wrong to turn the Nazi history of many expellees into an accusation of collective guilt, it was a major cause of the postwar expulsions.

Can one therefore call the entire German population that fled or was driven out of central and eastern Europe "victims"? Even today, blame towards the Poles, Czechs, Russians, and participants of other so-called "expelling countries" still resonates in the term "expulsion". However, hundreds of thousands of Germans died because the various Nazi generals, in order to hold on to East Prussia, Silesia, and other regions for as long as possible, gave the order to evacuate too late. Countless people died while fleeing during the winter.

Today, they are counted as victims of expulsion and not as Nazi or war victims. In the big commemoration and jubilee celebrations in 2005, the figures of war refugees and of postwar expellees were permanently combined. The numbers of casualties were also exaggerated. For instance, although in 1997 the joint German–Czech commission of historians insisted that there were a maximum of 30 000 victims from the Sudetenland,<sup>6</sup> during the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war and the beginning of the expulsions, talk in the media was of 250 000 dead Sudeten Germans. Exaggerated numbers were quoted on German national radio, in the major newspapers, even in the leftwing *Tageszeitung*, despite the number demonstrably being based on a statistical mistake in the general census of 1946, which included as casualties all those who were missing or had gone underground.

The novel feature of the victim discourse of the early twenty-first century is that it has been initiated by the Left. Günter Grass, Helga Hirsch, and other publicists, as well as historians such as Karl Schlögel, have been claiming for a number of years that the displacement has been subject to a taboo by the liberal left majority in Germany. There is even talk of the "return of memory", as if the subject had been forgotten. In southern Germany, in Christian and rural milieus, in most families affected, and thus in the majority of West German society, this was never the case; nevertheless, the influence of the 68ers is strong enough to convince both the right- and the leftwing media of the taboo thesis. Biographical aspects also play a role. As Helga Hirsch has emphasized in numerous books, her generation did not want to listen to their parents when they told them about their fate during the displacement. Now, there is the wish to let them receive at least posthumous justice and thereby process a part of one's own childhood influence. This biographically-based renunciation of one's own ideological imprint is a tradition for the 68ers. Almost forty years ago, a great many members of communist, Maoist, and various other leftwing splinter groups had equally biographical motives for their activities. Often, they came from bourgeois families that had been embroiled in National Socialism, and thus were unable to communicate with their parents about the latter's criminal culpability and complicity. While, forty years ago, escape was still sought in collectivist ideologies, today the individual "fates" of expellees are highlighted. What is important is the individual's role as victim and the trauma that the Germans experienced during the bombing and as refugees. These stories sell better than causal explanations about how the expulsions came about in the first place and why, particularly on the German side, the stories of the victims and the perpetrators are closely interwoven.

### **Memorians: Remembering Germans as individual victims**

As evidenced by the numerous newly launched history magazines (*ZEIT Geschichte*, *Geo-Geschichte*, etc.), the *Spiegel* special issue, and the success of filmmaker Guido Knopp's TV docu-soaps, history has become a business fuelled by loud theses, dramatic pictures, and shocking individual destinies. A new professional sector of "Memorians" has arisen, which is engaged mostly outside the universities, unencumbered by obligations of careful historical research. The medial processing occurs under the label of "memory", which lends authenticity to the business of history and simultaneously justifies the concentration on individual destinies, even if doing so explains neither the Holocaust nor the expulsions. Since Germans have come to consider the successful process of having come to terms with the past to be part of their national identity, the criticism from historians such as Norbert Frei that research on the National Socialist crimes still has to be continued bounces off

the "*memorians*". It is said that since so much is now known about the Germans as culprits, and that the Germans have achieved so much in the way of coming to terms with the past, one can now, as a counterbalance so to speak, turn to the victims. While few have expressed it quite so crudely as Martin Walser, when he said that the Germans were fed up with their eternal role as perpetrators of the Holocaust, even the liberal–left newspaper *die ZEIT* has pointed out a logical and chronological sequence. According to *die ZEIT*, the FRG and the liberal–left mainstream since 1968 have worked over German guilt and criminal culpability sufficiently to now enable a turn to the subject of the German victims. Or, in the words of Sebastian Ullrich in the first issue of *ZEIT–Geschichte* in early 2005:

The increase in the remembrance of the German victims of war and displacement observable in recent years is not only about a mere return to the conceptual models of the 1950s, since the contemporization of German suffering takes place in a completely altered historical–political context and no longer serves the relativization of German crimes. In the late 1990s, as a result of the debate surrounding the *Wehrmacht* exhibition<sup>7</sup> and the Goldhagen controversy, the consciousness of German culpability became even more acute.<sup>8</sup>

According to this view, the consciousness of culpability need no longer be made any more acute and one can now turn to new subjects, especially German victimhood.

An essential difference to the historical discourses of the 1950s is that the selective memory of the "Berlin Republic" is now taking place without being directed from above, in other words by the government. The driving forces are, besides the National–Conservatives, reformed 68ers, who in advancing age are proving to be what perhaps they were all along: good Germans who contribute to consolidation of national identities through their construction of history. The rhetoric of these good Germans is a lot better than it was fifty years ago; they speak the rhetoric of global victimization and political correctness, they know about the Holocaust and would never deny it, they own up to the dark side of German history with gusto, and demand only that Poland and the Czech Republic do likewise and adopt the attitude of penitence, thereby smugly insinuating to these countries that they have not yet attained the level of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany.

### **A new German understanding of history and the reactions in eastern central Europe**

There is another difference to the 1950s: the debates about history in Germany are closely followed in central eastern Europe. Since 1989, above all Polish newspapers and television have access to a wide network of correspondents in Germany. There prevails among them, and the Polish intelligentsia as a whole, a special interest in history. Almost every educated Polish family had at least one grandfather or uncle who fell victim to the German occupation. Forced labour, starvation, or the loss of property were part of everyday life in any case. For this reason, a sensitivity exists in Poland to the way National Socialism is treated in Germany that the contemporary German is barely aware of. Solely on the basis of size and economic strength, Germany enjoys far greater attention in Poland and the Czech Republic than vice versa. That is why the functionaries of the associations of expellees are better known there than in Germany itself. The name Erika Steinbach, the chairwoman of the

League of Expellees, is almost as well known as that of Gerhard Schröder or Angela Merkel, and she has been on the front pages of Polish magazines on many occasions.

Above all else, it has been the expellees associations' demands for compensation for former property in the east that has sparked off defensive reactions that have found expression in the enlargement contract with the EU and elsewhere. The Polish government insisted — essentially for fear of the Germans — on a long-lasting transitional ruling on purchasing real estate, which they paid for with massive labour market restrictions. When the *Preußische Treuhand* [Prussian Claims Conference], an organization with close staff ties to the expellees associations, first announced appeals for damages against Poland, the Polish parliament reacted with a *unanimous* decision in Autumn 2003 calling on the government to claim compensation from Germany should damages be claimed from there. The content of the resolution and, more so, the unanimity, represent a return to the 1950s, when the Communist party chairman Wladyslaw Gomulka subsidized anti-German votes in order to ensure support for socialism and compulsory fraternity with the Soviet Union. Rationally speaking, the Sejm [Polish parliament] resolution is hard to understand, since a thorough legal assessment has deemed the damages claims against Poland hopeless.<sup>9</sup> However, it is above all at the local level that Poles who live in houses that formerly belonged to Germans are worried. A third of the Polish population live in the former German eastern territories, hence these fears are no marginal social phenomenon. Aside from this, the alleged threat posed by German expellees always makes good capital for election campaigns. Before the parliamentary and presidential elections in autumn 2005, the *Preußische Treuhand* made the headlines again, even though it was only repeating the old demands of 2003.

Erika Steinbach's proposal to build a *Zentrum gegen Vertreibung* [Centre against Expulsion]<sup>10</sup> met equal outrage. The original conception of 2003 proposed that the centre, together with a "commemorative rotunda", be built in a "central location" in Berlin, which would mean indirect competition with the Holocaust memorial. According to initial plans, the centre would have a clear national historical orientation and primarily serve the commemoration of the German victims of displacement. In Poland, it was above all the prospect of being placed in the dock by the Berlin exhibition that had politicians of every stripe up in arms, including the former foreign minister Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, who despite having been imprisoned in Auschwitz counts as markedly pro-German. In response to Steinbach's plans, he threatened to set up a centre in Poznan documenting Prussian oppression. Steinbach herself is also a source of continuous irritation. The CDU rightwinger was born in Poland as the daughter of a soldier in the German occupying forces. The fact that she now counts as an expellee — correctly so, according to German law — and acts as spokesperson for a victims' association is felt by Poles to be mockery. German chancellor Gerhard Schröder distanced himself from the planned *Zentrum gegen Vertreibung* in the summer of 2003, but in 2005 it once more became the subject of party political stand-offs. Angela Merkel included the centre in her manifesto, thereby sparking off a storm of indignation in Poland. Two motives can be presumed for the chancellor candidate — who if anything is a liberal — playing the expellee card. Either Merkel wanted to bring on side the right wing of the CDU/CSU and the votes of the German expellees, or she really was thinking about a re-interpretation of contemporary German history. This tactic failed in that the Union lost 9 per cent of its votes in Bavaria, the stronghold of German expellees — far more than it did on average nationwide. This aside, in view of the state of the EU,

the German government can hardly afford a freeze in relations with Poland and the Czech Republic.

In Poland, there is the suspicion that legal and financial claims lie behind the moral acknowledgement of German victims. In the postwar period, the *Bund der Vertriebenen* [League of Expellees] (BdV) has followed a dual strategy: the recognition of the displacement as an injustice and the compensation of expellees by Poland and the Czech Republic. After 1989, the BdV continued this policy and made these countries' acknowledgement of its view of history a condition of any *rapprochement* with Germany. The representatives of the BdV voted in parliament against the German–Polish treaty of 1990/1991, against the German–Czech reconciliation declaration of 1997, and opposed the EU accession of Poland and the Czech Republic should either country fail to distance itself clearly from the expulsions.

Since the decision on EU enlargement, Steinbach has drawn not so much on the lexicon of the Cold War as on the international repertoire of victim discourses. The matter is no longer one of subsidization and interests but of memory, commemoration, and acknowledgement. In Germany, not only do former expellees such as the late SPD politician Peter Glotz, who ten years ago one would never have thought to see in the proximity of Steinbach, allow themselves to be thus ensnared, but also intellectuals such as Ralph Giordano. In comparison to the global victim rhetoric of the expellees associations, the Polish parliament's unanimous resolution of autumn 2003 seems anachronistic. There, the language of the Cold War frothed up once again, as Germany was brusquely held responsible for war damage and threatened with demands for reparations. In the summer of 2006, Poland protested in similar manner against a large exhibition in Berlin about the expulsion compiled by the BdV as a precursor of the planned centre.

In Germany, these protests in Poland are met with incomprehension. The question often heard from a variety of journalists from public broadcasters and quality newspapers was why the Poles react so exaggeratedly. It was never asked if a problem exists in the way the past was dealt with in Germany. In a country that has come to define itself through its successful *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [coming to terms with the past], that would have been a blow to the national identity.

An indication for the recent shift in the German understanding of history lies in the weighting of the issues. During the events in 2005 commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war, the focus was on the bombed cities and the expellees (n.b. rarely on the refugees, which would in fact have been correct). In contrast, the crimes of the occupying armies in Poland played a much less prominent role. Completely forgotten were the hundreds of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war who met their ends in German camps as a result of hunger and disease. A forgetting can be noted in Germany regarding this subject that stands in marked contrast to the boom in its own victim discourse. The speech of the German president Horst Köhler on 8 May 2005 serves as an example of this paradigm shift. He recalled the German crimes of sixty years ago, but the word "occupation" occurred not once, while at four separate junctures the subject turned to the expulsions and the expellees. This speech clearly corresponded to the consensus in German society, since criticism came from neither the Left nor the Right.

## **Disinterest and old grudges towards Poland**

The widespread lack of understanding for Poland is based less on an active repression of the German crimes over sixty years ago, which Köhler recalled, so much as on an asymmetrical awareness. Only a handful of German newspapers and radio stations have correspondents in Warsaw. Germans know Poland little if at all; knowledge of the language is the exception. Surveys about Poland still reveal shocking prejudices. This has not improved essentially since 1989, only Germans' arrogance towards the "Polish economy" has, in view of the crisis in their own country, been tempered. In German schools, Polish remains an exotic subject option, even in states near to the border such as Saxony and Brandenburg.

Educated Germans often also lack the most basic knowledge about Polish history, even though it is closely tied to German and Prussian history. Prussia rose to power on the back of the division of Poland in 1772, 1793, and 1795. Even the foundation of the German empire in 1871 was based on the continuation of this division. Given the size and significance of the Polish minority and other Slavic-language groups, one might well ask whether the German Empire, and above all its core state Prussia, was really a nation-state. The many Polish names in Berlin and the Ruhr are evidence of Polish migration during the nineteenth century. However, barely anything of this Polish influence remains visible — one of the many consequences of National Socialism and German nationalism.

EU enlargement has brought a new element into play alongside ignorance and prejudice: the fear of "cheap competition" from the east. As early as 2001, talk at negotiations on EU enlargement was only of "opening the gates", the threat of a "flood" of immigrants, and the need to "channel" and to "dam", as if hundreds of thousands of Poles were standing on the banks of the Oder waiting to swamp Germany. Though the problem may have been diverted by the seven-year block on labour immigration from the eastern EU member states pushed for by the Schröder government, people now have reason to fear the eventual opening of the labour market.

The fear of immigration from the east is reminiscent of a comparable discourse of over one hundred years ago. No less a figure than Max Weber, in his inaugural lecture at Freiburg University on "The nation-state and economic policy", warned about immigration from Poland. In 1895, Weber explained the ousting of German agricultural workers from their jobs by the ability of the "Polish race" to live under poorer conditions, if need be "eating the grass from the ground".<sup>11</sup> The sociologist pleaded for a mix of assimilation and repression and an active settlement policy, in order to impose minority status upon Poles in the Prussian partitioned territories. Poles faced many forms of discrimination in the German empire: in becoming civil servants, in exercising the right to form groups, and in school and other public facilities. It was above all the manipulation of ethnic population formation according to the imperial settlement law that had fatal consequences. The German settlers in the east could not prevent the Poles from becoming a modern nation. However, after WWI, when Poland again became an independent state, the new government attempted to expel the imperial colonizers. The sequence of settlement and re-settlement that Bismarck had begun was thereby continued. During WWII, it reached a climax with the mass expulsion of Poles from the "Warthegau" and after 1945 with the expulsion of the Germans from the Polish territory newly extended to the west.

A forerunner of racist attitudes towards Poles among the German middle classes was the author Gustav Freytag. The most successful German novelist

of the nineteenth century set his novel *Soll und Haben* [Debt and Credit] (1855) in Silesia and in the Prussian partitioned territories, portraying his protagonist Anton Wohlfahrt as a "Kulturträger" [bearer of culture] in the east. First, the son of a provincial Protestant family works his way up from humble surroundings to become a tradesman who must succeed in a number of adventures in neighbouring Poland. In the second part, he proves himself to be a man in the Prussian partitioned territories, defends a German aristocrat against a Polish mutiny, and secures the estate for his fatherland. Freytag's Poles are thievish, bearded, and unwashed fellows, who must be met with the necessary toughness so that they become docile. At a central juncture in the novel, Wohlfahrt says that there is "no race so little equipped for progress and for gaining humanity and education through its own capital as the Slavic". That was why the Germans had a right and a duty to "colonize" Poland. The entire novel reads like a roll call of German virtues: diligence, orderliness, modesty, and honesty. The social and confessional features of Wilhelmine Germany as a respectable, Protestant nation were defined in contrast to Poland. The demonization of the Jews, who are portrayed in the novel as liars and as dangerous, is spiteful. Freytag has the Jews in his book speak with Polish syntax, thereby exoticizing them, even though the Jews in his own region of Silesia were in truth strongly assimilated into German culture. Not only was *Soll und Haben* the German empire's bestseller, it could also be found on the bookshelves of every more respectable middle class household in Germany until well into the postwar period. Freytag later transferred his colonial attitude towards the Poles to the overseas colonies and rose to become a prominent activist in the German Colonial Association. In the German Empire, his novel became the founding work of a literary genre in itself, so-called *Ostmarkenliteratur* [literature from the eastern territories], the pendant to English or French colonial literature.<sup>12</sup>

The response from the Prussian-ruled Poles was different to that described in *Soll und Haben*. They appropriated the allegedly exclusively German virtues, built up an independent system of fraternity in the financial sector, and also responded in the cultural sphere. Henryk Sienkiewicz, the subsequent Nobel laureate, wrote the historical novel *Krzyzacy* [The Crusader] to some extent in response to Freytag, insofar as the Germans were represented as invaders and exploiters. He turned the alleged *Kulturträger* in eastern Europe, as the Germans saw themselves, into warriors and barbarians, interested only in the Slavic riches. Even if the Prussian Poles threw off some of their complexes as a result of these economic and cultural achievements, the fear of the Germans and the colonizers remained an obsession in the interwar period, and were confirmed for the worst during the period of occupation. Today, the affluence divide, deepened above all by WWII, awakens a sense of inequality. In Poland, Germany still enjoys the reputation of a more orderly, more developed, and wealthier nation, which because of its power nevertheless remains fearsome. This background may also help understand the heated reaction to Steinbach and the *Preußische Treuhand*. It arises from a fear developed over the course of a century.

It is up to politics and the public sphere in Germany how this fear is handled. A possibility would be an internal elucidation by the German Federal Republic of the legal system regarding claims to property by former expellees. Nevertheless, the expellees have received partial compensation for their lost property in the east since the 1950s, which could in fact be made repayable if their former property were turned over to them. It would be possible with this calculation to persuade many of the plaintiffs in Poland or soon at the EU level to withdraw their claims.

Just as important would be not to set up the *Zentrum gegen Vertreibung* in Berlin. It has become clear that the BdV, together with Erika Steinbach, has gathered sufficient funds to open an [exhibition](#) in Berlin in August 2006. One year earlier, Steinbach even announced at a press conference that she had secured the Michaelskirche in central Berlin as a location for the memorial centre and the permanent exhibition. However, a short while later the Cardinal of Berlin, Georg Sterzinski, announced that he considered the centre to be ill-timed and would therefore not be making his church available. Next, in a joint declaration with their Polish counterparts, the German bishops clearly distanced themselves from the prestige project of the BdV, whereupon Erika Steinbach accused the head of the German conference of bishops of "monstrosities" and breach of the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not lie" [*sic*]. This outburst and the CDU's poor election results may have irretrievably damaged Steinbach's project; however, this does not change the fundamental problems in the German discourse on expulsion and recent history. Moreover, the recent exhibition opened in August of 2006 was perceived relatively warmly by the media, so the public mood might change in favour of Steinbach.

### Differentiating views of expulsion histories

One of the underlying problems of this exhibition is that in recent years, the terminology of the expulsion has mutated into a catch-all concept for all kinds of victim histories around the end of WWII. It subsumes the evacuations by the National Socialists as well as the flight from the Red Army, the expulsion between the end of the war and the Potsdam Agreement as well as the contractually sanctioned forced re-settlement after August 1945. This drawing of equivalences is therefore already questionable, since behind flight and expulsion hide various destinies. As mentioned, the National Socialists were too late in giving the evacuation order in many regions, in order to use the German civilian population as a buffer against the advancing Red Army. However, those who did find their way into the West in good time, such as the many higher party functionaries and members of the social elite, mostly got off lightly. On the other hand, the victims of the so-called "wild expulsion" in spring 1945 suffered from the deep hatred towards the former occupiers vented on them. In comparison, the expulsion according to the terms of the Potsdam Agreement was more organized, above following further agreements at the beginning of 1946 between the Allies and those states in central eastern Europe.<sup>13</sup> In both cases, the impoverished expellees arrived in a postwar Germany that was suffering from general hunger and had no more living space to hand out. Flight and expulsion is by no means one and the same thing, therefore; aside from which, the biographies before and after the traumatic loss of home also differ according to the region of origin. Sudeten Germans faced different experiences and conditions under which to start up again after 1945 than, for example, East Prussians or Silesians.

What the expellees associations do have in common, however, is that former Nazis and Greater German nationalists were often able to assume leading positions within their ranks, including the long-serving chairman of the Sudeten German association, Lodgman von Auen. As the historians Detlev Brandes and Jiri Pesek unearthed, before the war Lodgman von Auen was author of a text in which he encouraged the mass re-settlement of Czechs. This chapter of the past of the expellees has been left untouched.

During the multiple commemoration ceremonies in 2005, the pronounced fixation on the expulsion experience sidelined the period after the expulsions as well as history before 1945. It is one of the tasks of historical research to

broaden this perspective again. Particularly the period after the expulsion remains largely in the dark.<sup>14</sup> This applies not only to the expellees associations, but to all expellees who arrived in Germany. An explanation for the continued lamentation at their fate could be that in postwar Germany no one really wanted to listen to them — that they could not communicate their tragic experiences, or if they could, only among themselves. This means, however, that expulsion and the lack of critical attention paid to it is primarily an internal problem of German postwar society and only secondarily an international problem between Poland and Germany or the Czech Republic and Germany. In Poland and the Czech Republic, there is also relatively little known about the postwar history of regions in which expulsions took place.

### **Memory — a heterogeneous and transnational object of research**

Historians are facing a fundamental challenge. On the whole, the concepts of remembrance and memory depend upon what a national collective imagines when it thinks back over the past. The German version of Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoires* may indeed have begun to overcome this collectivism; however, the focus remains on the German remembrance of various epochs.<sup>15</sup> As the Austrian cultural historian Moritz Csaky has revealed, this line of research obscures far too much the internal differences of remembrance within a nation.<sup>16</sup> He also stresses the transnational character of remembrance, which, if one looks at the discourse of expulsion, one can only confirm. The German expellees remember places that have long since ceased to be German, in just the same way that Polish expellees refer to places that today belong to Ukraine or Lithuania. Also, the lost cultures of the east can in many places be understood as mixed cultures rather than imprinting them with their national stamp.

Moreover, the impact of collective memory is transnational. Today, Germany is no longer an isolated western frontline state as it was in the 1950s, when it was possible without much international protest to sideline the non-German victims in order to be able to emphasize one's own suffering all the more. Today, Germany's eastern neighbours view every change in its self-understanding with suspicion. Helga Hirsh might respond stubbornly that national remembrance and mourning must continue to be possible. However, as soon as this is taken up by the media, it automatically becomes transnational. As uncomfortable as they might be, the claims from Poland, the Czech Republic, and Israel represent a corrective that the '68 generation can provide only as individuals. A dialogue on history can develop out of this, one that no longer revolves around irreconcilable memories, but, in international collaboration, looks for explanations as to why the twentieth century produced so many catastrophes and what can be learned from that today. The foundation in September 2005 of the European network Memory and Solidarity was aimed in this direction; here, Poland, Germany, Slovakia, and Hungary will research collaboratively the history of totalitarian regimes, and thereby the war and forced migration. Planned in the scope of the foundation's activities is a travelling exhibition and a lexicon on forced migration. It remains to be seen, however, how far the new Polish government will continue to support the project and whether the Czech Republic and Austria will become substantially involved.

In the future, historical research about the expulsions should overcome the currently fashionable fixation on individual destinies, for the reason that the original sin of modern history, the Holocaust, is characterized by the fact that, as an individual, one could not escape persecution. A similar principle applied

to the expulsions, which did not depend on which nationality a person aligned themselves to. The late Czech historian Jan Havranek summed up precisely the difference between the fate of the Jews and that of the expellees: "The journey of the second ended upon crossing the border of Bavaria or Saxony, in poverty, with only their resourcefulness to fall back on. The journey of the first almost always led through Theresienstadt to the gas chambers of Auschwitz."<sup>17</sup> The compartmentalization of history into individual victim discourses ultimately only brings with it the relativization of the Holocaust. Even if this is not openly admitted, that can be the underlying intention of the commemoration. One wants to be victim both in private and in the global discourse, in Germany too. As the sociological research in the book *Opa war kein Nazi* [Grandpa wasn't a Nazi] shows, the tendency is widespread, particularly among educated Germans, to suspect that one's own family members were innocent witnesses, victims, or resistance fighters.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, national socialist biographies are suppressed. If family history is already being prettified today, it is no surprise that there are attempts to change society's entire view of history. If one transposes the rehabilitation of one's family history onto the level of society, then barely anyone in Germany still wants to be a culprit, but rather a victim. However, it is precisely the Poles who lived during the occupation and their children and grandchildren who know who the culprits were. For Germany, there is no escaping this history, no matter how much present-day Germans might long to.

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<sup>1</sup> In conjunction with the policy of détente, however, there were basic attempts to process the German-Polish relationship. Cf. especially the many essays by Klaus Zernack summarized in his book, *Preußen -- Deutschland -- Polen. Aufsätze zur Geschichte der deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen*, Berlin 1991.

<sup>2</sup> The debate over Jedwabne is documented in the journal *Transodra* in German and Polish. Cf. Ruth Henning (ed.) "Die 'Jedwabne-Debatte' in polnischen Zeitungen und Zeitschriften. Dokumentation", in: *Transodra* 23, Potsdam 2002. The most accessible version is online: [www.dpg-brandenburg.de/text/inhalt23.htm](http://www.dpg-brandenburg.de/text/inhalt23.htm) (Accessed 5 October 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Here the four-volume source documentation by Lemberg and Borodziej about the treatment of the Germans in Poland, which has also been translated into German, is recommendable. Cf. Hans Lemberg and Włodzimierz Borodziej, *Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945–1950. Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven*. 4 Vols. Marburg 2000–2003.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Spiegel spezial* from 18.6.2002: *Die Flucht der Deutschen*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. on picture language of the expulsion Heidemarie Uhl, "Deutsche Schuld, deutsches Leid — Eine österreichische Perspektive auf neue Tendenzen der deutschen Erinnerungskultur", in: *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 33 (2005), 160–180.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Konfliktgemeinschaft, Katastrophe, Entspannung. Skizze einer Darstellung der deutsch-tschechischen Geschichte seit dem 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gemeinsamen deutsch-tschechischen Historikerkommission [the German-Czech Joint Historical Committee], Munich 1996, 69.

<sup>7</sup> [www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/](http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/)

<sup>8</sup> *die ZEIT Geschichte*, Nr. 1, Part 1, April 2005, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the report by professors Jan Barcz (University of Warsaw) und Jochen Frowein (University of Heidelberg), which is available on the website of the Polish embassy in Berlin (<http://ambasadaniemiec.pl/files/gutachtenbarcz-frowein-dt.pdf> (Accessed on 5 October 2005)). Cf. on compensation claims also Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, "Doppelt betrogen? Der Streit um die polnischen Entschädigungsansprüche an die Bundesrepublik Deutschland", *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 5/6 (2005), 323–332.

<sup>10</sup> [www.z-g-v.de/english/index.html](http://www.z-g-v.de/english/index.html)

<sup>11</sup> "Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaftspolitik: Akademische Antrittsrede von Dr. Max Weber o. ö. Professor der Staatswissenschaften in Freiburg i.B.", Max Weber, *Schriften und Reden*, Vol. 4. 2: *Landarbeiterfrage, Nationalstaat und Volkswirtschaftspolitik. Schriften und Reden 1892–1899*, ed. W. J. Mommsen, Tübingen 1993, 535–74, especially 545, 551, and 553.

<sup>12</sup>

On the colonial attitudes in the empire towards Poland, cf. Philipp Ther, "Deutsche Geschichte als imperiale Geschichte. Polen, slawophone Minderheiten und das Kaiserreich als kontinentales Empire", in: Sebastian Conrad und Jürgen Osterhammel, *Das Kaiserreich transnational. Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, Göttingen 2004, 129–148.

- <sup>13</sup> Cf. on the different phases of flight and expulsion from a comparative perspective Philipp Ther, et al., *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945–1956*, Göttingen 1998.
- <sup>14</sup> Among the exceptions is the book by Finnish historian Pertti Aho, *After the Expulsion. West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945–1990*, Oxford 2003.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 Vols., Munich 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. on the critique of the national focus of remembrance research Moritz Csaky, "Gedächtnis, Erinnerung und die Konstruktion von Identität. Das Beispiel Zentraleuropas", in: Catherine Bosshart–Pfluger et al. (ed.), *Nation und Nationalismus in Europa. Kulturelle Konstruktion von Identitäten*, Frauenfeld 2002, 25–50, here 26.
- <sup>17</sup> Jan Havranek, "Das tragische Jahrzehnt in Mitteleuropa", in: Richard G. Plaschka et al. (ed.), *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn 1938–1948. Aktuelle Forschungen*, Vienna 1997, xiii–xviii, here xvii.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Harald Welzer / Sabine Moller / Karoline Tschuggnall, *'Opa war kein Nazi'. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, Frankfurt 2002.

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